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Spring Program 2026

KW

KW Institute for Contemporary Art's Spring Program 2026 explores Berlin—its materials, people, and histories—alongside KW's own building as an active framework for artistic inquiry. Centered on artists and their processes, exhibitions by **Klara Liden**, **Jean Katambayi Mukendi**, and **Else Marie Pade** engage with the social, technological, and ecological conditions shaping the present, situating artistic practice within the lived realities of the city.

– Emma Enderby, Director



KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2025; photo: Frank Sperling.

Exhibition 21.02.–10.05.26

Opening 20.02.26

Klara Liden *Kunstwerke*

Curator: Emma Enderby

Assistant Curator: Lara Scherrieble

Part of me is this poor architect dealing with the problem of existing structures in the city, part of me is this amateur dancer who wants to return ideas of rhythm to the activity of building, or of re-appropriating the built environment. – Klara Liden



Klara Liden, *Grounding*, Film still, 2018. Courtesy the artist.

An early photograph by Klara Liden (b. 1979, SE), *Self Portrait with the Keys to the City* (2005), has come to define the artist's two-decade-long practice. The *keys* are tools for opening the city—bolt cutters, wrenches, a flashlight, a manhole-cover lifter—used to test the rules that govern public infrastructure. Often using her own body, Liden reveals how these structures script our actions, and how one might navigate, and subtly reclaim, environments shaped by control and exclusion.

Spread across three floors at KW, *Kunstwerke* brings together central works from the early 2000s to the present and marks the first large-scale survey and the first institutional solo exhibition of Klara Liden in Berlin, where the artist has lived for over twenty years.

Trained as an architecture student, Liden's practice draws on public spaces of the cities in which the artist has lived—Berlin, New York, and Stockholm—using materials sourced from these urban environments. Cardboard, metal, concrete, wood, fences, and street banners become space-defining works; found objects such as garbage cans or components of municipal lighting are brought directly into the exhibition space. Liden describes these processes as “unbuilding”—a deliberate repurposing and transformation of objects. The artist's video works continue Liden's interest in thinking about how the body inhabits space, both private and public, and how these spaces define and control that movement. Liden moves through the city by falling, climbing, and dancing in the street, on train carriages, street signs, and drainage pipes and, in doing so, engages with the aesthetics and mechanisms of social order – raising fundamental questions about ownership, access, use, and participation.

Exhibition Texts

The installation *Unheimlich Manöver* (2007) extends across the first rooms on the ground floor of KW, consisting of the entire contents of Liden's former 30-square-metre apartment in Stockholm: furniture, books, clothing, a refrigerator, radiators, a sink, and a bicycle. The work was created when the artist left the city for good. “Unheimlich”—meaning “uncanny” or “disturbing”—literally translates as “that which is not home,” or “unhomely.” Early videos installed within the installation focus on domestic and public space, from *Bodies of Society* (2006), in which Liden performs an elegant choreography while attacking a bicycle in her apartment, to *Paralyzed* (2003), where the artist dances on a Stockholm commuter train, climbs into the luggage rack, and hangs upside down from a handrail. *Ohyra* (2007), also filmed in the Stockholm apartment, captures a private violence with the artist oscillating between punching herself in the head and washing dishes. *550* (2004) is named after the street number of a Brooklyn home in which Liden filmed herself moving topless while singing a strange, rambling song in English, German, and Spanish about needing more space. Music plays an important role in Liden's work: in early videos, the artist wrote and performed the soundtracks, later collaborating with musicians to develop compositions.

The KW hall houses a series of sculptures and wall works, all drawn from urban landscapes. At the center is *Rosie Rosie* (2026), a modular sculpture consisting of materials used to construct the temporary passageways that are erected throughout Berlin to protect pedestrians from building sites. The graffitied surfaces are left in places and covered elsewhere, echoing Liden's habit of removing the signage of urban space.

The video works *0,0,0 (Berlin)* and *0,0,0 (London)* are named after the RGB code for the color black. In the videos, filmed in Berlin and London, a camera closely follows the artist and shows her back as a nondescript black field moving through the city that only comes into view at the frame's margins. Like many of the works seen in the exhibition—from the *Poster Paintings* to the streetlights works—Liden creates a subtractive world for us to try and piece together.

A series of kinetic works of rotating highway signs, their surface erased to veil their original purpose, materially capture the dense, all-encompassing visual landscape of the city—with its omnipresent messages competing for public attention—while the abstract, monochrome surface of the works simultaneously forms a quiet, empty counterpoint to the commercial oversaturation of the metropolitan environment.

In a similar way, Liden's engagement with everyday urban elements unfolds in her streetlight works and trashcan series, which are scattered throughout the exhibition. Liden removes decommissioned streetlights and lighting elements from kiosks, pharmacies, and Spätis, as well as trashcans from all over Europe from their functional, urban context and transfers them to the exhibition space. Through this decontextualization, formerly utilitarian objects become sculptural forms that transcend their original function and everyday presence.

As Liden notes, "the question of re-appropriating privatized, urban space always somehow begins with the body." The artist often turns to the relationship between the individual and the architecture and objects of everyday urban life and in numerous performative interventions, she places her own body in direct dialogue with the world around her. The interventions, primarily situated in public space, begin with simple, sometimes everyday actions such as walking, dancing, or climbing and falling. They unfold as quietly radical gestures that question the order of public space and the role of the human body within it.

The first floor of KW includes Liden's ongoing series of slide projections from the early 2010s, where she bikes into the Seine with her video camera, climbs down a manhole in Berlin, and crawls under a carpet in New York. In *The Myth of Progress* (2008), Liden moves through Manhattan's streets at night, apparently walking forward yet imperceptibly gliding backwards. Her slow moonwalk amid traffic and city noise becomes a meditative inversion of forward motion. *Warm-Up: State Hermitage Museum Theatre* (2014) departs from Liden's usual video practice by placing herself among others, taking part in a ballet rehearsal in the Hermitage Theater in St. Petersburg. In a class of the Hermitage Theatre's ballet company, her visibly untrained movements misalign with the disciplined uniformity of the group's strict coordination, subtly exposing the discipline, bodily norms, and theatrical conventions embedded in classical dance.

At the center of this floor is *You're all places that leave me breathless* (2020), filmed in Berlin during the pandemic, where Liden performs another physically demanding feat: she climbs along the elevated tracks of the U1 above Skalitzer Straße, one of Germany's oldest subway lines. Her movements are deliberate and controlled, yet the action itself appears repetitive, almost futile: a choreography of exertion with no clear destination. The title is taken from a line in the 1951 musical *Royal Wedding* and refers to Fred Astaire's iconic dance sequence in which he appears to run effortlessly across walls and ceilings. Astaire's cinematic illusion of weightlessness—created through a rotating set and a stationary camera—stands in sharp contrast to Liden's visible struggle with gravity, which she emphasizes in every calculated movement.

Liden's interest in dance is often apparent in her videos, from following the ballet class to moonwalking to referencing Fred Astaire. As collaborator John Kelsey has written, "Liden has shown that when architecture is practised with a body and as an attention to rhythm, we find ourselves moving very close to dance." These dance-like, physically demanding actions probe the unwritten rules of public conduct. They express a desire to alienate materials or spaces—and bodies—from their prescribed functions, instead, as Liden writes, "inventing ways of making these things improper again."

Through 2002–2003, Liden removed posters from advertising billboards across multiple city blocks in Stockholm, leaving the city to wake up to spaces devoid of advertisements. In their place, Liden left stickers bearing the work's title, *U TRY MME* (2002), and turned the removed billboards into a handmade book. This work served as a precursor to the *Poster Paintings*, an

ongoing series begun in 2007 and installed on the wall. The posters, which come from Berlin and other cities, are layered on top of one another and then covered with a white sheet of paper, leaving only traces of their original message or function.

As seen throughout the exhibition, in Liden's work, municipal structures become sites for sculpture. Shown on the second floor of KW, the series of *Junction Boxes* found on the streets of Berlin sit as unassuming yet ubiquitous objects that double as city infrastructure.

In the seminal video *Grounding* (2018), Liden moves through Manhattan's Financial District, beginning at the Wall Street subway station. The artist walks steadily along sidewalks, through scaffolding and other architectural markers, only to be abruptly interrupted by sudden, deliberate falls. Each collapse is followed by an almost immediate recovery, as if nothing has happened. The work draws loosely on the 1991 music video for Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy*. In contrast to the music video, featuring vocalist Shara Nelson striding through the streets of Los Angeles, *Grounding* replaces continuity with disruption. As Liden passes iconic sites of global capitalism, her body repeatedly trips, slips, and falls—movements that refuse both spectacle and heroism. These actions recall the basic mechanics of physical comedy, yet they are stripped of humor. The falls are unsettling precisely because they are uncontrolled: they interrupt the smooth choreography expected of bodies in spaces governed by unspoken norms rather than explicit rules. In this way, *Grounding* sharpens the tension between bodily vulnerability and the demand for regulated movement within the privately owned public spaces of the Financial District, revealing the city as contested ground shaped by economic power, state control, invisible thresholds, and regulation, exposing how such environments quietly discipline those who move through them. As Calla Henkel writes, "We do not have to accept how things are. This is what Klara Liden always reminds us with her work."

Artist Biography

Klara Liden's (b. 1979, Stockholm) multidisciplinary practice evades straightforward categorization, traversing a range of media including video, performance, sculpture, structural intervention, and installation. The work often incorporates materials sourced from urban loci, which are dismantled and reconfigured, rendered anew and ripe for re-encounter with an inventive, at times playful verve – a process the artist describes as "unbuilding." Engaging with architecture and its environments, as well as the social constructs surrounding material function, the practice centres around the body in relation to these elements. It is marked by an enduring exploration of the physical and psychological bounds of inhabited space, both public and private.

Klara Liden lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include *Over out und above* at Kunsthalle Zürich (2025); *Square Moon* at Sadie Coles, London (2024); *VERDEBELVEDERE* at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York (2024); *(0, 0, 0)* at Galerie Neu, Berlin (2023); *BABARUE* at OCTO, Marseille (2022); *Auf jeden Fall*, Secession, Vienna (2019); *Battement battu*, WIELS, Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2015); *InvaLidenstrasse* at Museion, Bolzano (2013), *Bodies of Society*, New Museum, New York (2012); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2011) and Serpentine Gallery, London, (2010).

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